

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.

There is no doubt that without the patient advice and assistance of Augusto Auler we should not have been able to make this quite amazing trip. On the ground at Peruaçu we were also helped by Luís Piló. In the Serra da Bodoquena Eddie and Sandra da Costa together with Almira from the Abismo Anhumas were our saviours whilst all the other Brazilians that we met could not have been more helpful. We can never thank you enough.

We are also indebted to Augusto Auler (Brazil) and Tony Waltham (U.K.) for constructively commenting on this article.

REFERENCES.

- Auler, A., 2000. Jacques Robertson. Um geológico americano no vale do Peruaçu na década de 50. *O Carste* vol. 12 no. 4. 2000. pp 176-179.
- Auler, A., Rubbioli, E., Brandi, R., 2001. *As Grandes Cavernas do Brasil*. Grupo Bambui de Pesquisas Espeleológicas, Belo Horizonte, Brazil. ISBN 85-902206-1-3. p108-111.
- Carste Consultores Associadas. Website www.carste.com.br
- Lowe, David and Waltham, Tony., 2002. Dictionary of Karst and Caves. *Cave Studies Series No. 10*. BCRA, Great Hucklow.
- Moura, V.M.A.de., 2001. Novas viagens: A dolina da Onça. *O Carste* vol.13 no. 3, pp160-164.
- Piló, Luís., 1997. Caracterização Regional Do Carste Do Vale Do Rio Peruaçu. *O Carste* vol. 9 no. 2. 1997. pp22-29.
- Piló, Luís., Rubbioli, Ezio., Cavernas do Vale do Rio Peruaçu. pp453-460. www.unb.br/ig/sigep/sitio017/sitio017.pdf
- Rubbioli, Ezio., 2008. 25 Anos topografando cavernas. *O Carste* vol. 20 no. 3, 2008.
- Sociedade Brasileira de Espeleologia., 2009. *As Maiores Cavernas do Brasil*. www.sbe.com.br/cavernas_maiores.asp
- Webber, George., 2007. *Lagoa Santa Sites (Minas Gerais, Brazil)*. www.andaman.org/BOOK/text-LagoaSanta/text-LagoaSanata.htm

ALSO OF NOTE.

- Atlas do Janelão*. By Prous, A., Rubbioli, A., Chabert, C., Piló, L., Brina, A. & Horta, L. 2003. Au Pre de Madame Carle. Grupo Bambui de P.E, Belo Horizonte and Federation Francais de Speleologie, Paris.
- Auler, A., 2004. *Bambui Karst, Brazil*. pp133-135. Gunn, J (Ed) Encyclopedia of Caves and Karst Science. Fitzroy Dearborn, New York.
- Great Caves of the World*. By Tony Waltham 2008. Natural History Museum, London. ISBN 13:978 0 565 09216 0. Gruta do Janelão pp46-49.

PHOTOGRAPHS

Photo 01. Lapa do Brejal downstream exit.

Photo 02. Arco do André upstream view.

Photo 03. Scenery around Lapa do Janelão

Photo 04. Lapa do Janelão main passage just downstream from Doline 1.

Photo 05. Lapa do Janelão and the Dolina dos Macacos.

Photo 06. Lapa do Janelão main passage as seen from the edge of the Dolina dos Macacos.

Photo 07. Lapa do Janelão and Dolina dos Macacos reflections.

Photo 08. Lapa do Janelão and the downstream exit.

Photo 09. Lapa do Caboclo rock art.

Photo 10. Lapa do Caboclo seats.

Photo 11. Lapa Bonita and the Salão Vermelho.

Photo 12. Lapa Bonita and helictites.

Photo 13. Lapa Bonita with paragenetic channels.

Photo 14. Lapa dos Desenhos rock art.

Photo 15. Lagoa de Sumidouro - a seasonal karst lake with small cave where rock art and many fossils were found by Peter Lund.



SIKKIM

October 14th to November 2nd 2009

Report by Peter Hodge

The objective of this trek was the Goeche La (Goecha La) in Sikkim. This pass is a terminal moraine at 4950 metres and only 5 kilometres from the south east facing wall of Kangchendzonga.

Attending:

Albert Chapman
Howard Humphreys
Arthur Salmon
Frank Wilkinson
George Burfitt
Liv Triggs Hodge
Peter Hodge

The
complete
team



Sikkim, wedged in between eastern Nepal and Bhutan, with Tibet (China) glowering over its northern boarder, was its own kingdom until 1975 when it became a part of India but old habits die hard and there is still a border to cross and a passport to be stamped as it is still a "restricted area". In fact when we applied for the Indian visa we were told not to mention Sikkim. In these days of open borders the Sikkim stamp is, nurdishly, a collectors item I would think.

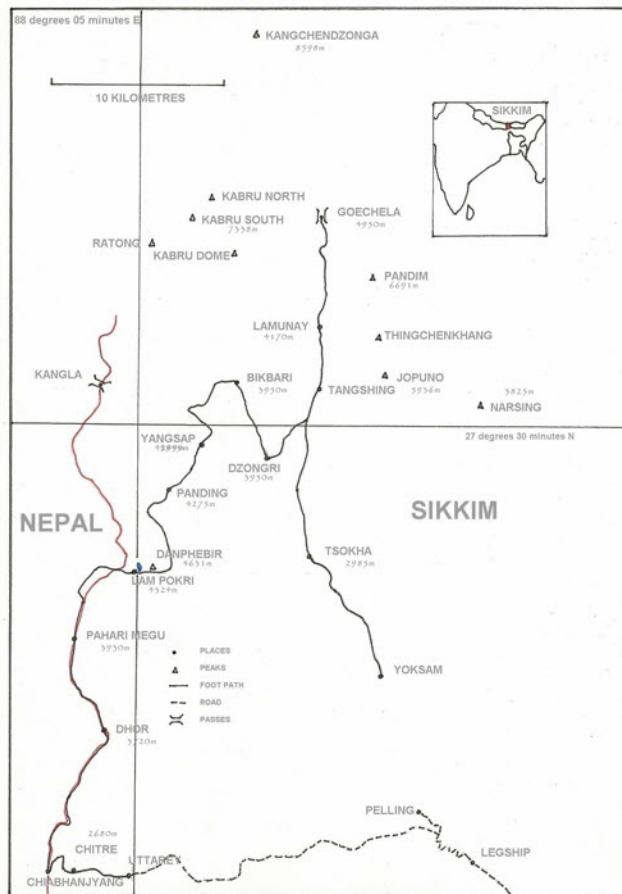
After the Bhutan trek, for me the best to date (out of only two treks I hasten to add) it was rumoured that there was going to be one to Sikkim but that it would have a more cultural slant, which is ok in itself but I definitely wanted to trek so had not considered going. However when I saw the itinerary I realised that it was all trek. I really wanted my wife, Liv to see what it is like in the Himalayan foothills and I am sure she had hinted that she could not stand the cold, particularly at night, but to ease my conscience, I asked her if she would like to go and she accepted with alacrity. Albert, our leader, accepted my request to bring a guest so that was that. I just had to hope that there were no misogynists amongst the other trekkers. It probably also helped in that it was going to be a very small party, at first 6 and then 7.

During this trek, it became obvious that this was to be the "bestest" ever. But strangely, in my mind, the Ladakh trip had been promoted to second place and Bhutan relegated to third place. Not too sure why this happened but my heart seemed, suddenly to hold a great affection for that amazing desert place. Anyway you always remember the first one don't you?

Even though I had done two previous treks the preparation for this one was all consuming and required as much thought as the others. Due to some quirk of the web, or that of the web user, I did not receive a kit list and relied entirely on experience and what I had taken last time. This seemed to work and Liv was never really cold at night. (Phew!) The RAB women's Quantum 600 did the trick and the silk liner was sufficient. How these compare with fleece liners I do not know. I will mention here the YRC holdalls (dufflebags) that Rob Ibberson acquired, they were just the ticket. Plenty big enough for the necessary gear and small enough to handle on trek.

We all met at Manchester, terminal 3, and you could not fault the BA flights to Delhi, the transfer at Heathrow terminal 5 being very easy. The Hotel in Delhi was brief, low key and perfectly adequate. (It is all very nice staying in places like the Imperial but not necessary). The Kingfisher flight from Delhi to Bagdogra (Shiliguri), via Guwahati was exceptional!! (the plane flies past Bagdogra to Guwahati and then backtracks to Bagdogra. The flight was the reverse at the end of the trek) We saw the whole Nepal Himalayan range, Kangchendzonga and the mountains of Bhutan twice, north of which we had walked two years previously. There was an hour's delay at Guwahati as they had pumped on too much fuel.

This had to be pumped or sucked off. I did not know they could do that!



We were met at Delhi by Pawan of Rimo, who was as polite and efficient as ever and in Bagdogra by Mr Rimo himself, Motup and his wife Yangdu. Motup was coming with us to hold our hands once again. It really is comforting to have the guy about, just that added bit of security.

The roads we drove on were not too good. In many places they had been washed out by the last monsoon and maybe even the monsoon before that. I would think that the Minister of Roads is not an enviable job. Many rock and mud slides had occurred and whilst we were driving back at the end of the trek it was rumoured that a rock had fallen onto a car crushing all three occupants! Buddha acts in mysterious ways. On the Bagdogra to Darjeeling leg it didn't help that the Shiliguri to Darjeeling "toy" railway criss-crossed this road but when it did the track was laid on the road and ramped with tarmac.



During the drive from Bagdogra to Darjeeling we stopped for a drink at Kurseong. In the sunset you could just make out Kangchendzonga, about 50 miles due north. Motup said that he had not seen it as clear in 20 years. From the Windamere Hotel in Darjeeling a much better view. The Windamere goes back to the Raj and is very pukka. White gloved waiters etc but it was possible that one of the tiny spicy breakfast sausages had not been cooked quite properly as George Burfitt found out about two hours later. He collapsed in the town, felled like a tree. It was so quick. Luckily the recovery was almost as quick.

After getting George back to the hotel we did a bit of site seeing. First the station where five tiny steam engines, built in Glasgow in 1926, were being tended to, oiled and watered then to the Happy Valley Tea factory that supplies Harrods. We learned all about first and second flush at a Harrods priced tea shop back in town. Then the zoo. As always zoos are anticipated but are a huge anticlimax as you watch the poor dejected animals pacing up and down or just lying listlessly about.

Finally the Everest Museum at which I would have liked to have spent more time. There was a gallery of 30 or so photographs of everybody who was anybody in relation to the biggest peak including the likes of Hillary, Tenzing, Tilman and Nawang Gombu. Who? Nawang Gombu.

This man is Yangdu's father, he is 77 and was the first man to climb Chomolungma twice. This stood for 20 years. It is said that he has two hearts and three lungs. And then we were to have lunch with this guy, at his house. What a privilege! We all received welcome scarves and a signed copy of his book



Kangchendzonga dominates the western half of the province. After a second night in Darjeeling, at the Windamere hotel we drove to Pelling. In the afternoon we walked to Pemayantse monastery. This is the second largest in Sikkim. All the monks and novices were lined up to wait for a visit from the Indian interior minister, from Gujerat. We did not wait but passed him on the road out. He wished us a good day.

Apparently he was responsible for a massacre of 3000 muslims several years ago.



Pictured is the team having dinner at Pelling.

During the night it rained heavily. This was the only rain we experienced until we got back to Yorkshire.

Next day we drove to Uttarey.



The police post at Uttarey

Our trek started from Uttarey, which is only 5 k east of the boarder with Nepal on Latitude 27d 16m N. Here we had a final cup of tea, served by a very attractive lady, watched the tsos being loaded up and then set off ourselves. A final collectors stamp in the passport at the police post and we started to climb. We went due west up onto the Singalila Ridge camping at the police posts at Chitre and Chiabhanjyang. These were encircled by a high wire fence with pairs of bottles hanging at intervals on it. These to act as some sort of alarm system I imagine.

Our party consisted of: 7 trekkers, 10 tsos, (a tso is a cross between a domestic cow, for temperament, and a yak, for strength and sure footedness) 10 porters, 4 cooks, 3 tsomen and 3 guides.

We were to loose three of our party. Firstly Howard. He just hadn't got the fitness and appeared to be puffing after a climb up the hotel steps. Secondly Motup. There had been an avalanche accident on Thingchinkhang, south east of

Pandim, one Indian climber killed and two sherpas injured. The sherpas were Rimo men so Motup had to go and see that they were ok. In the event they were. One of the sherpas stayed with a second fatally injured Indian climber overnight surrendering his coat. It was now that our head man to be, Kunzang, appeared. Thirdly Albert whose knees just could not take any more. Or did he fancy another cup of tea?

We followed the border and the ridge north for 2 more camps, Dhor, where we rose early to climb a ridge to view the Kabru trio at sunrise, our first taste of things to come, and Pahari Megu which was well into Nepal. We then turned east to camp at Lam Pokri. This camp was close to a sacred lake which had many standing stones raised at the river outlet by the pilgrims, and beyond the lake a hill called Danphebir at 4631m. 3 of us decided to get up there and have a look. We made for a col and as we topped the rise the view hit you between the eyes. Absolutely mind blowing. I have to say it brought tears to my eyes. From this vantage point you could see three of the four highest mountains: Makalu and Everest, at about 75 miles due west and the ever present Kangchendzonga, about 25 miles to the north. We spent too long up there as it was getting dark as we headed back to camp. We claim Danphebir for the YRC.

We made our way east and then north crossing two ridges, to Yangsap, Panding and Bikbari (which means "poison fields" although there was no evidence of this.) All these camp sites were excellent. Plenty of room and level ground.

From Bikbari we came south to Dzungri which used to be a royal grazing ground. Getting there for lunch we all climbed a nearby hill in the afternoon. I am sure the views were as good as from Danphebir but they did not seem so. We must be getting used to them. We could see Narsing to the east and then moving anti clockwise Jopuno, Thingchinkhang, (upon which two Indian climbers had been killed) Pandim and then west of north, Kabru Dome and Kabru North and South, Janu in the distance and Ratong. Kangchendzonga could just be seen peeking out above the Kabru trio.

There were very few religious sites in Sikkim but just north of Dzungri there was one which consisted of 4 twelve foot stone pagoda style towers which looked up to the Kabru trio.



At Dzungri, 9 of the 10 porters were paid off as provisions had been eaten and there was less to carry. They received a 20% tip and went singing off down the hill. From Dzungri we walked north east and joined the busy route from Yoksam to Goeche La.

Most people take this route and a lot of them are unprepared. It takes a week and it is possible the unscrupulous trek organisers take advantage of students who have no idea what to expect. The first camp on this route Tangshing was big and well used. There was a "bothy" near where the path entered the camp site which was partly a ruin. These refuges had been put up about 20 years ago but now the use of them is prohibited. The area is now a national park. They are even planning to move all the inhabitants from Choka, our penultimate village and camp site, to Yoksam.

We walked through Tangshing and up to Lamunay, which is not marked on the map. We were woken at 0300 the next day with tea in order to start walking at 0400 with head lamps. This we did so that we could watch the sunrise on Kangchendzonga. We arrived at the first view point at 0520. Spectacular. On the way to this view point we passed a holy lake, Samiti Pokhari, nearby was another derelict refuge. Our leader, Kunzang, and indeed Motup before him, kept saying that this was the best view so no need to go further and walk within your own capabilities, and remember that when you arrive at the pass you are only half way, almost trying to dissuade us from getting to the Goeche La. I left impatient, the first view point with another guide, Dorjay, and we got to the 2nd view point at 0645 and the Goeche La at 0724.



2nd view point

I spent about 20 minutes on the pass but the wind was strong so we tarried as long as was comfortable. We met the others coming up to the 2nd view point and of these only George continued to the Goeche La. The site from the 1st view point was awesome. Huge lateral moraines, dry glacial lakes and the towering peaks. We were back in Lamunay for lunch and then another 2 hours to camp at Tangshing. This was our longest day.

The next day we walked on down the busy path, lunching at Phedang and bypassing Dzongri to Choka (Tsokha). This little farming village had a small monastery and a government office. The camp sites were at a premium but the guide that we sent ahead did his job and we used our allotted site.

Every village has its dogs. Even some of our remote campsites which were near summer farms attracted the attention of the lone dog. These dogs are active at night and rest up during the day so can be quite tiresome. Shades of that long noisy night in Ladakh.

The path from Uttarey to the Nepal border had been constructed from rocks to enable the police to travel quickly, (Police are used as they are not so symbolically aggressive as the army. This is the same at all Indian border posts) and the road from Phedang to Yoksam was also graded but this one mainly from tree trunks split in half to present two flat surfaces. This was no doubt built to help supply Choka.

From Choka we walked to Yoksam, the road head, and a hotel. An unusual arrangement in that our trek cooks cooked at this hotel until we left the next day and we had gone through the tipping ceremony.

There were some beautiful flowers on our route but nothing near us lush as Bhutan. We saw the occasional small bird, heard one or two, saw a couple of kestrels and a larger hawk. There were very few mammals, a small rabbit at Dhor, George and Liv saw a red pander as it crossed the path in front of them. These are bred in captivity and released on the Singalila ridge. Near Lamunay we saw a number of Tahr. These are small goat/sheep type animals and not very common.

We did not see any blue sheep. As we came through the forests in the first few days we picked up quite a few leeches. I also discovered a coloured beetle (tick?) that was trying to attach itself to the inside of my arm. He was not as stealthy as the leech and I felt his teeth so was able quickly to remove it.

The lunch spot between, Choka and Yoksam, was just off the path. There was a sort of wooden pagoda thing under which we sat and the guys were cooking up in the bushes close to the other side of the path. Tsos were going both ways up and down the path and at one time the opposing trains were trying to cross at our lunch site and we ended up having to vacate the pagoda as the tsos were coming through.

We walked another two hours during which time I managed to fall off the path. A drop of about 10 feet or so trying to avoid a tso in a similar situation to lunch. Tsos going up and tsos going down and very little room. The road was "cobbled" and had been made up with stone and we started to walk through fields of millet and vegetables and then farms and houses and finally we were on the outskirts of Yoksom. We bought some Fanta and sat and waited for everybody to catch up and then walked to the Tashi Gang Resort. On the way we met Albert and outside the hotel Howard. Liv and I had a very palatial apartment.

There are separate kitchens for the trek cooks to carry on doing their bit and the evening meal was huge: rice, bbq chicken, salad, duchess potatoes, spring roll and veg. There was another large cake for pudding.

For those who wanted it there was a strange drink made from millet. The millet was boiled and then yeast added. Large, wooden, iron bound, litre sized tankards contained water with the fermenting millet floating on top. The alcoholic liquid was sucked out through a straw and then the tankard topped up with more water.

After dinner we thrashed out the tips. Kunzang supplied us with the daily wage of each person and we allotted 20% to each. All a bit of guess work and no real guidance as to how much to give.

The hotel is good apart from the occasional power cut. It is on the edge of town and very rural with the sounds of cows, chickens, children and various birds and as you are dropping off to sleep the usual dog chorus, but this time the dogs sounded quite frantic and barks reaching a crescendo as each dog tried to outdo the other.

During the afternoon we witnessed a Buddhist funeral. A man of 69 who was one of a trekking party of 12 Americans suddenly died two days in. His daughter was with the party so she was able to agree to this cremation. Albert and George went to observe the proceedings. The guy is folded up into a foetal position and then placed upright in this tiny casket which is carried, with music and chanting, through the juniper fires to the funeral pyre which is on the banks of a river. The outside logs of the pyre are wet and melted butter is poured on the middle. This burns furiously without being visible behind the damp logs. In the end all is burnt and the ashes are taken away by the river.

After breakfast we carried out the tipping ceremony.

In Ladakh and Bhutan Motup had been present at and before this ceremony so was able to advise as to how much to give. I feel that each trek should have some guidance in this procedure as none of us knew how much the guys earned in order to work out a percentage. In the end we asked Kunzang but we still had the problem with his tip. They all seemed to depart happy so at least we hadn't under tipped.

We drove from Yoksam to Kalimpong which has a frantic market and the excellent Himalayan Hotel. This road was like all the others as it followed the river Tista downstream passed several new hydro schemes.

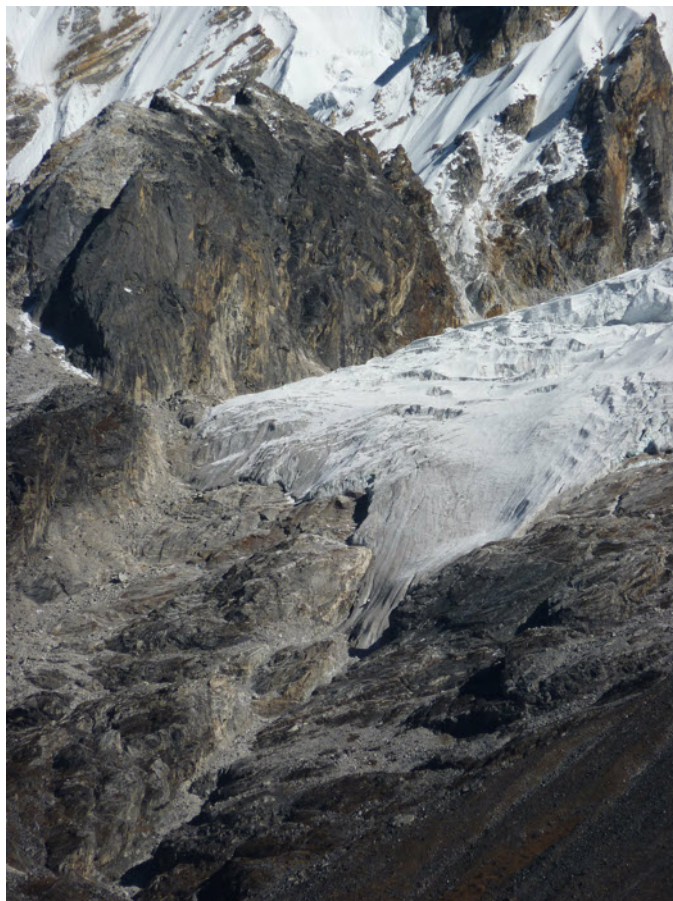
This has to be the most vertically inhabited country I have ever been in.

And then suddenly you left behind the verticality as it changed to horizontality. Fields, straight roads, road markings, factories, suburbia and Indian urban sprawl. The transition was instant, and then to Bagdogra (Shiliguri) airport

For those that completed the trek there were very few sprains and bruises, no altitude problems and only minor gastric issues. All in all it was a very successful expedition.

Rimo also performed faultlessly and professionally. But I think that this is the norm all over India and the Himalayas. It is just that Albert has such a good relationship with Motup that we get the personal touch and the odd little gems along the way that other trekkers would not be able to witness.

In Delhi, Motup had invited all of us to dinner so we were driven straight from the airport, as the plane was 2 hours late, to his apartment for a sumptuous meal. Then a quick 4 hour sleep and onto the plane for home. Again everything went well with BA back to Manchester.



Above, the team resting and not falling in

Top right - bottom of Pandim

Right - Peter on Goeche La





FREY'S PEAK

RATONG

KABRU SOUTH

KABRU NORTH

PANDIM

THINGCHINKHANG

JOPUNO

NARSING



THINGCHINKHANG



DANPHEBIR



FROM DANPHEBIR



BETWEEN LAM POKARI AND YANGSEB



DZONGRI CAMP